

ACOS ALLIANCE

ANNUAL REPORT

2024

CREATING A CULTURE OF SAFETY for Journalism

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ABOUT US

The ACOS (A Culture Of Safety) Alliance is a unique global coalition of 160+ news organizations, journalist associations and press freedom NGOs working together to champion safe and responsible journalism practices. Our mission is to embed a culture of safety within journalism so that independent media and journalists globally can play their essential role in upholding democracy.

We believe that safety is a prerequisite for a strong, independent media - the backbone of democracy. We focus on the safety of freelance and local journalists because they play an essential role within newsgathering and are the most vulnerable in a profession that is increasingly at risk of violence, threats and harassment.

Our work is structured around three pillars

1

COORDINATION & COLLABORATION

We advance collaboration, dialogue and best practice around journalist safety issues.

2

PRACTICAL SAFETY SOLUTIONS

Our initiatives help journalists and editors implement the Freelance Journalist Safety Principles and democratize access to safety training and resources for under-resourced journalists, editors and newsrooms.

3

ADVOCACY AND NEWS INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

As a leading voice in journalist safety, we advocate for safe and responsible practices within newsgathering and raise awareness of the Freelance Journalist Safety Principles among news managers and journalists globally.

A PIVOTAL YEAR FOR THE ACOS ALLIANCE

Elisabet Cantenys
Executive Director, ACOS Alliance



2024 has been a transformative year for the ACOS Alliance — a year of growth and renewed purpose.

This year we proudly established ourselves as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in the US, after years of generous stewardship by the Overseas Press Club Foundation as a fiscal sponsor. This milestone marks our first ever annual report, inviting you to celebrate our journey and achievements.

Over the past year, the Alliance expanded significantly: welcoming new team members, deepening our programmatic footprint, and securing increased funding – a BUILD grant from Ford Foundation, new support from Limelight Foundation and Luminate Foundation, and renewed partnerships with OSF, MacArthur Foundation and The Reva and David

Logan Foundation. From pioneering safety trainings for editors to learn how best to adhere to the Freelance Journalists Safety Principles, to offering opportunities for freelance and local journalists to access relevant safety training and resources, our impact has been both practical and profound. As a coalition, none of this would be possible without our partners and signatories — over 160 organizations who fuel our mission with commitment, expertise and solidarity. Thank you to all who partnered with us in 2024 – your collaboration is the heartbeat of our progress.

ACOS stands apart in its role as a force multiplier, leveling the safety playing field — amplifying safety efforts across the journalism landscape and ensuring no-one is left behind, in particular freelance and local journalists. We do not duplicate; we

connect. We do not compete; we convene. In a world where journalists face threats not just from conflict zones but also from disinformation, online harassment, and legal intimidation, our work is more urgent than ever.

As stories are silenced and media space shrinks, we remain steadfast. Safety is neither optional nor a luxury — it is the foundation of press freedom and democracy. In these uncertain times, the ACOS Alliance offers a constant: a coalition grounded in trust and partnership, driven by purpose, and united by the belief that together we can build a culture of safety for ALL journalists.



Safety is neither optional nor a luxury — it is the foundation of press freedom and democracy.

COORDINATION & COLLABORATION

As a unique, multi-stakeholder alliance with a global network, ACOS fosters collaboration and dialogue to advance best practice and innovation around journalist safety issues. We use our convening capital to encourage the sharing of resources, expertise, ideas and innovations for the benefit of journalists and newsrooms, and we actively seek and build partnerships to help us deliver our activities.

In 2024, we worked with 35 partners to deliver our safety initiatives. Our annual Safety Training Mapping with Free Press Unlimited shared safety training insights among 24 NGO partners, and the ACOS Safety Task Group email - which now has 180 users - shared safety opportunities, calls for help and referrals for assistance among NGOs, journalist associations, news organizations, and safety trainers.

79

organizations attended
the 2024 ACOS Meeting

24

NGO partners shared information in our
annual mapping of journalist safety training

180

users of the ACOS Safety
Task Group email

ACOS Alliance Annual Safety Coordination Meeting 2024



The 2024 ACOS Annual Meeting took place on October 21-22 in London, supported by Reuters, Dow Jones, Knight Foundation and Media Defence.

This year’s meeting explored safety lessons from the coverage of conflict, elections and climate, and the value of peer support within newsrooms and journalist networks. Participants shared their risk assessment confessions, looked at ways to improve the safety of journalists in exile and learned about the creation of new AI tools designed to support journalist safety.

The 2024 edition was our most diverse to date, attended by 116 participants from 32 countries, including 38 media organizations, 27 NGOs, six journalist networks and eight funders. ACOS funded the attendance of 27 editors and freelancers from Lebanon, Honduras, Nigeria, Ghana, Madagascar, Poland, Ecuador, Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, Colombia, Germany and Greece.

Seeing the ACOS community all in one room was something special. I’m in awe of your ability to bring together such a diverse group united around building safety principles and practices. It’s such critical and important work.

- meeting participant



[Read the 2024 Meeting Summary Report](#)

Image: Frankie Mills

PRACTICAL SAFETY SOLUTIONS

ACOS works collaboratively to create practical safety solutions that help journalists and editors implement the [Freelance Journalist Safety Principles](#), and level up the safety playing field for freelancers and under-resourced journalists and newsrooms.

In 2024 we created training opportunities for journalists and editors at all stages of their safety journey, from 90 minute workshops to four-day HEFAT courses, and we invested in partnerships to reach new communities with training tailored to their specific needs.

Whether local or international in scope, every initiative provides an opportunity to apply lessons learned to other safety training contexts and helps us to raise standards.

27
safety initiatives

1000
journalists and editors
accessed our safety
initiatives

568
journalists and editors completed
a safety training course, workshop,
clinic or cohort

Safety initiatives for JOURNALISTS

Despite their prominent role within international and local reporting, freelance and local journalists remain the most vulnerable in a profession that is increasingly at risk of violence, threats and harassment.

In 2024, our safety initiatives trained more than 400 journalists in Asia, Europe, East Africa, LATAM, the middle east and USA. These ranged from full HEFAT courses to shorter, targeted trainings and 90 minute workshops focused on specific safety needs and issues.

141
journalists completed
a full HEFAT or safety
training course

262
journalists attended
a safety workshop



Case study

MEXICO

NOVEMBER

21 journalists working in some of Mexico's most remote and dangerous regions completed a 4-day tailored safety training course organized by ACOS in partnership with [Frontline Freelance México](#).

This tailored training, supported by the [International Women's Media Foundation](#) (IWMF), helped participants to prepare for and mitigate risks across all areas of safety and to strengthen their networks. Targeted outreach and travel grants ensured the participation of journalists from fifteen states across the country.



“

This training has now given me a solid base to do my work. For five years, I have tried to take a course like this. The invitation to participate brought tears to my eyes.

- training participant



Case study

LEBANON

MARCH

19 journalists from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen gained safety skills in life-saving first aid, ballistics, gunfire and vehicle safety through our safety training partnership with Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ), Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR), SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom (SKF), and the Rory Peck Trust.

This initiative also included a safety management workshop for representatives from regionally-based NGOs working in journalist safety and press freedom, which helped strengthen their security planning and safety guidance for journalists, and improve their first aid skills.



Image: Leila Molana Allen

OCTOBER

As Lebanon came under attack from Israel, we partnered with PBS Special Correspondent Leila Molana Allen to deliver a quick turnaround HEFAT course for 12 young international freelance journalists who found themselves reporting from conflict.

None of the participating journalists had any previous experience of covering a war and no safety training. This two-day course - which was run at a very low cost using a free local venue and a Beirut-based trainer - provided them with essential hostile environment and risk assessment skills and included an Individual First Aid Kit (IFAK) for each participant.

Case study

SUDAN



Image: Phil Cox

DECEMBER

ACOS worked with Ayin Network and Native Voice Films to deliver a tailored day of safety training for eight Sudanese media makers, four of whom were involved in the making of documentary feature film KHARTOUM.

KHARTOUM tells the stories of five of the city's citizens who are forced to leave Sudan following the outbreak of civil war in 2023, and was selected for its premier screening at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2025.

Khartoum co-directors Anas Saeed, Rawla AlHag, Ibrahim Snoopy and Timeea Ahmed at the Sundance Film Festival.

Ayin regularly suffers trolling and cyberbullying from warring parties in Sudan and was conscious that the film's international profile could make the journalists - many of whom contribute to Ayin as freelancers - an increased target for online attack.

The training equipped participants with the skills to strengthen their digital security and assess, prepare for, and deal with any online violence after the film's release. This included sessions to support mental health.

A new partnership with World Press Photo

Increasingly, ACOS is approached by organizations who need help putting together bespoke safety training for their journalist communities. We help them identify the relevant training blocks, design course structures and put them in touch with trusted safety trainers and advisors. Where relevant, we may become implementing partners or provide travel grants to enable freelancers to attend.

In 2024, we worked with World Press Photo to create a bespoke package of safety training courses that formed part of their professional development activities for photojournalists and documentary photographers, most of whom are freelance. These included recent competition winners and jury members.

1X

3-day HEFAT
for ten freelance photographers working in highly volatile areas

2X

online safety workshops
covering risk assessment and contract safety - for their 2024 Joop Swart Masterclass program

90'

psychological safety webinar
for 12 Lebanese photojournalists



At WPP, we wanted to provide safety training for our network but lacked the means to do it alone. With ACOS’ support and expertise, we’ve trained over 36 photographers in HEFAT, psychological safety, contract safety, and digital security. We look forward to continuing this collaboration.

— Mercedes Almagro Ocaña,
Programs Project Manager



Image: Laura van Erp

A pilot safety training for journalists in exile

In June, in partnership with Alfred Friendly Press Partners, ACOS created a three-day pilot safety training for ten journalists in exile which formed part of a month-long program at the Missouri Journalism School in Columbia, USA.

The training was designed to help journalists in exile from Afghanistan, Belarus, El Salvador, Haiti, Kashmir, Nicaragua and Venezuela resume or continue their reporting in safety, taking into account issues such as transnational repression, source protection, and communication with family, colleagues and sources back home. It was delivered in collaboration with the Committee to Protect Journalists, Radio Free Asia and Voice of America.

As the number of journalists in exile around the world grows, there is potential to apply this new pilot curriculum to other geographies and contexts, and we are gathering lessons learned from the training to inform future application and development. Our partnership with Alfred Friendly Press Partners continues into 2025.



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Safety initiatives for EDITORS AND NEWS MANAGERS

News editors and managers are often overlooked when it comes to safety training. Many have an awareness of their safety responsibilities, but struggle to know where to start when it comes to putting things like duty of care, risk assessments and safety protocols into practice. This can have a direct impact on the safety of the freelancers they work with, as well as themselves, their colleagues and their organizations.

In 2024, we launched two new safety training initiatives for editors and newsroom managers: the Editor Safety Hub training platform, and the Editor Safety Cohort program.

155

Editors & news managers completed a safety training course, workshop, clinic or cohort



Image: Reuters

New Program

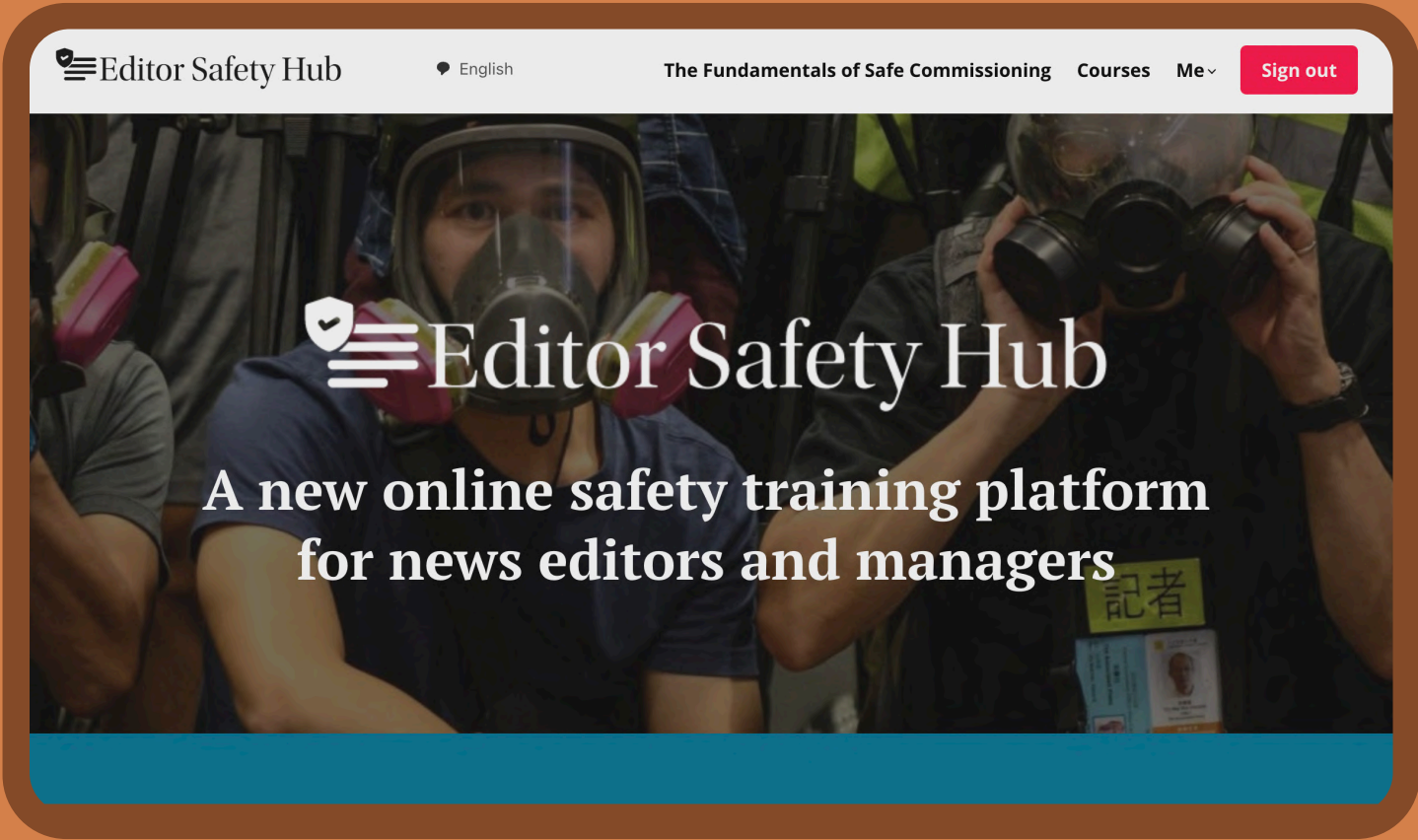
Editor Safety Hub

APRIL

In partnership with [WAN-IFRA](#), ACOS launched the [Editor Safety Hub](#) and its first online course *The Fundamentals of Safe Commissioning*, to fill a critical safety training gap.

The course equips news editors and managers with key foundation skills to safely commission journalistic work, support the safety of the freelancers they work with and practice self-care.

The course content was created in partnership with [Aegis Safety Alliance](#) and in consultation with news editors, safety trainers and educational consultants. Thanks to our partnership with [Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa \(FLiP\)](#) and [Samir Kassir Foundation](#), the course is now available in Spanish and Arabic in addition to English.



“ I now appreciate safety in the newsroom after this training. All the reporters I work with will now have a clear understanding of why safety matters [and] I have started developing a risk assessment tool for my newsroom.

- News Editor, Kenya



3 Hours

The Fundamentals of Safe Commissioning

This self-paced training course helps news editors and managers safely commission journalistic work.

10

course completions per month

100%

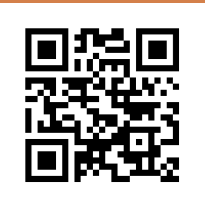
of editors said the course helped them to improve their safety related practices

100%

planned to apply the learnings of the course in their work

100%

would recommend the course to their colleagues



[Explore the Hub in Arabic, English & Spanish](#)

New Program

Editor Safety Cohorts

Launched in 2024, the Editor Safety Cohort program provides small groups of senior editors and newsroom managers with a focussed, collegiate environment for in-depth learning and discussion around safety, led by an experienced security trainer.

Over one month, weekly webinars focus on different aspects of the *The Fundamentals of Safe Commissioning* course, allowing participants to dive deeper into course modules, receive structured feedback and converse with peers. The cohort closes with a one-to-one coaching session helping participants to apply what they’ve learned to their own newsrooms and working environments.

ACOS ran two pilot cohorts in 2024: for editors based in Sub-Saharan Africa and in Latin America. Each cohort was made up of 15 editors from nine countries, including Angola, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Both cohorts were funded by the *Safety in Numbers* program.

“

My safety literacy before the editor cohort was non-existent. Now I’m using safety protocols in my work and championing them within my organization.

— Editor, Malawi

Resource

Leading Resilience

A guide for Editors and Managers working with journalists in Ukraine

APRIL

This new psychological safety guide for editors and news managers working in Ukraine was created in collaboration with the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma in response to Russia’s invasion and the ongoing conflict.

Through case studies, practical exercises, tools and templates, it provides a single, comprehensive source of information and support to help editors take a proactive approach to psychological safety and support the emotional well-being of the freelancers and journalists that they work with.



Image: REUTERS / David W. Cerny



[Read the resource in English](#)
[Read the resource in Ukrainian](#)

ADVOCACY & NEWS INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

ACOS is a leading voice in journalist safety, advocating for safe and responsible practices within newsgathering globally and promoting adherence to the Freelance Journalist Safety Principles, which remain the go-to reference for journalist safety standards ten years after their creation. All ACOS signatories publicly endorse the Principles and commit to their promotion and implementation.

Each ACOS signatory brings its own unique and diverse perspective to journalist safety. We harness this diversity to inform our work, amplify our message and advance our mission.

In 2024 we welcomed the following new signatories:

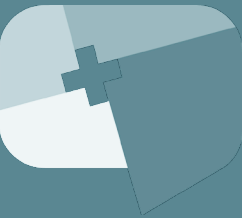
Contracorriente



El Toque



Mas Voces Foundation



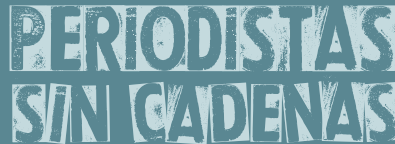
Netzwerk Recherche



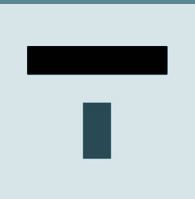
openDemocracy



Periodistas Sin Cadenas



Tech4Peace



The National Union of Journalists of Ukraine



Voice of America



2024 SIGNATORY: openDemocracy

Aman Sethi
Editor-in-Chief, openDemocracy

openDemocracy is a globally-dispersed non-profit newsroom with journalists who routinely deploy in challenging security environments.

Why did openDemocracy become an ACOS signatory in 2024?

We were searching for a community of value-aligned organisations to understand and discuss how to manage organisational risks in a supportive and collaborative environment. This led us to the ACOS Alliance.

Being an ACOS signatory means we are part of a network of peer organisations from whom we can learn best practices and access resources that would otherwise be too difficult, complex or expensive for us to access on our own.



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Working with ACOS has had a transformative impact on our safety practices and aspirations. One of our editors has already gone through [*The Fundamentals of Safe Commissioning*](#) online training course, we recently completed an audit of our safety and security practices and protocols and in the process of working with an amazing security professional to create a comprehensive safety protocol for our organisation -- all with ACOS' support.

Why does openDemocracy endorse the Freelance Journalist Safety Principles?

At openDemocracy, we are very aware of the risks borne by freelance journalists, especially as journalism becomes a riskier and riskier business around the world. [*The Freelance Journalist Safety Principles*](#) serve as a useful starting point for editors and reporters to have a healthy and open conversation about the risks associated with specific projects.

CONFERENCES AND FESTIVALS

In 2024, ACOS partnered with five international conferences to deliver safety sessions, clinics and workshops that promoted safe and responsible journalism practices, provided practical safety guidance and raised awareness of [The Freelance Journalist Safety Principles](#).



APRIL

Perugia, Italy

International Journalism Festival

Working with ten partners, we delivered 29 safety clinics, one psychological safety workshop and two safety panels for freelance journalists and editors attending the festival. .

JUNE

New York, USA

Photoville Festival

In partnership with [Committee to Protect Journalists](#), ACOS ran three safety workshops for the festival’s community of visual journalists, including how to safety cover elections and civil unrest.

OCTOBER

Johannesburg, South Africa

Africa Investigative Journalism Conference

Our Program Manager met with investigative journalists from across Africa to learn about their safety challenges, share ACOS safety resources and raise awareness of the ACOS Principles.

NOVEMBER

London, UK

Protecting Sources Conference

ACOS was invited by [CIJ](#) and [Freedom of the Press Foundation](#) to partner and co-organize this new conference. We helped shape the program, supported the participation of journalists and trainers, and delivered two safety sessions.

DECEMBER

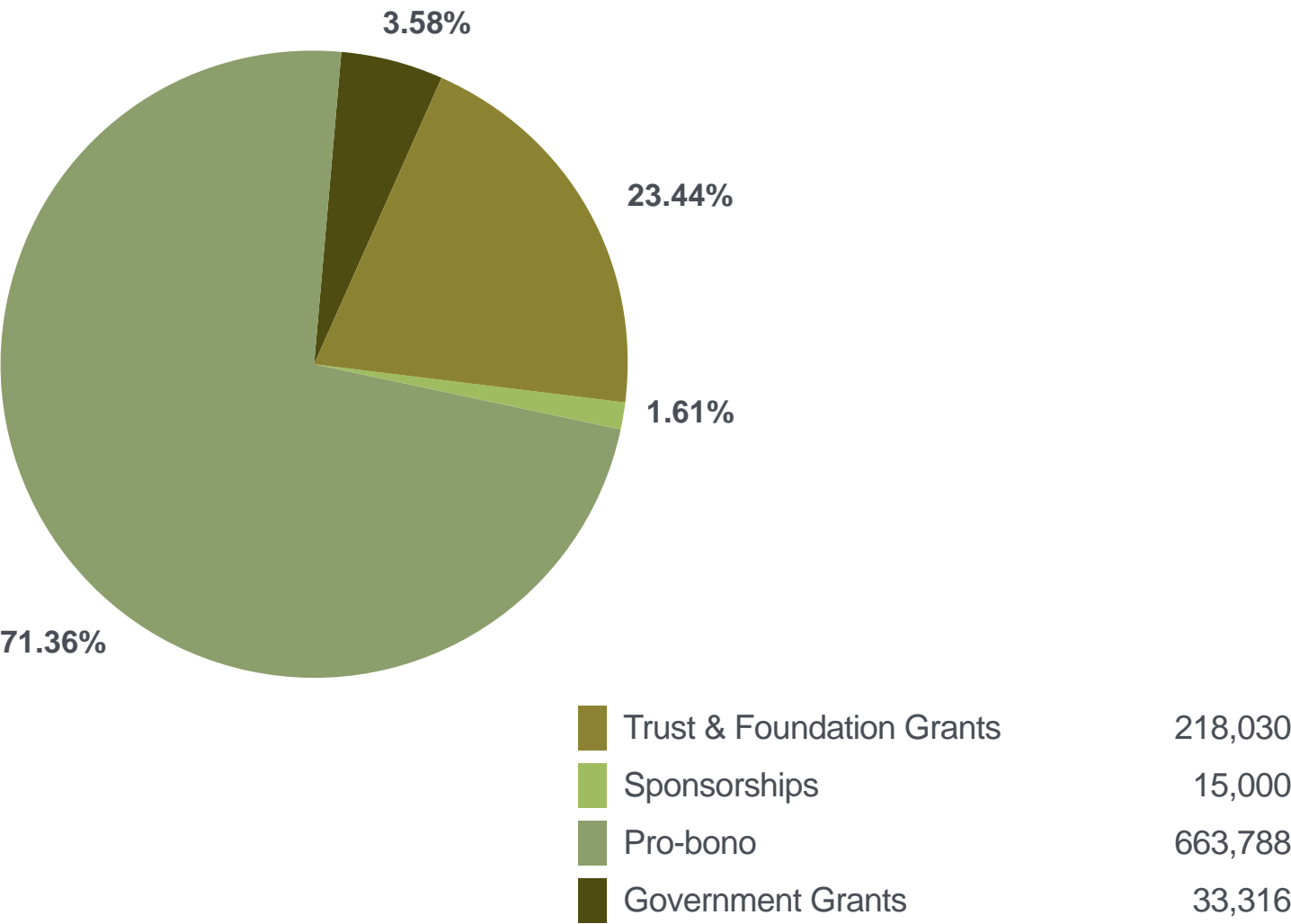
Aman, Jordan

ARIJ Conference

ACOS participated in a panel exploring the role of editors in conflict reporting, raising awareness of essential safeguarding strategies, resources and training available to editors in the MENA region.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Income



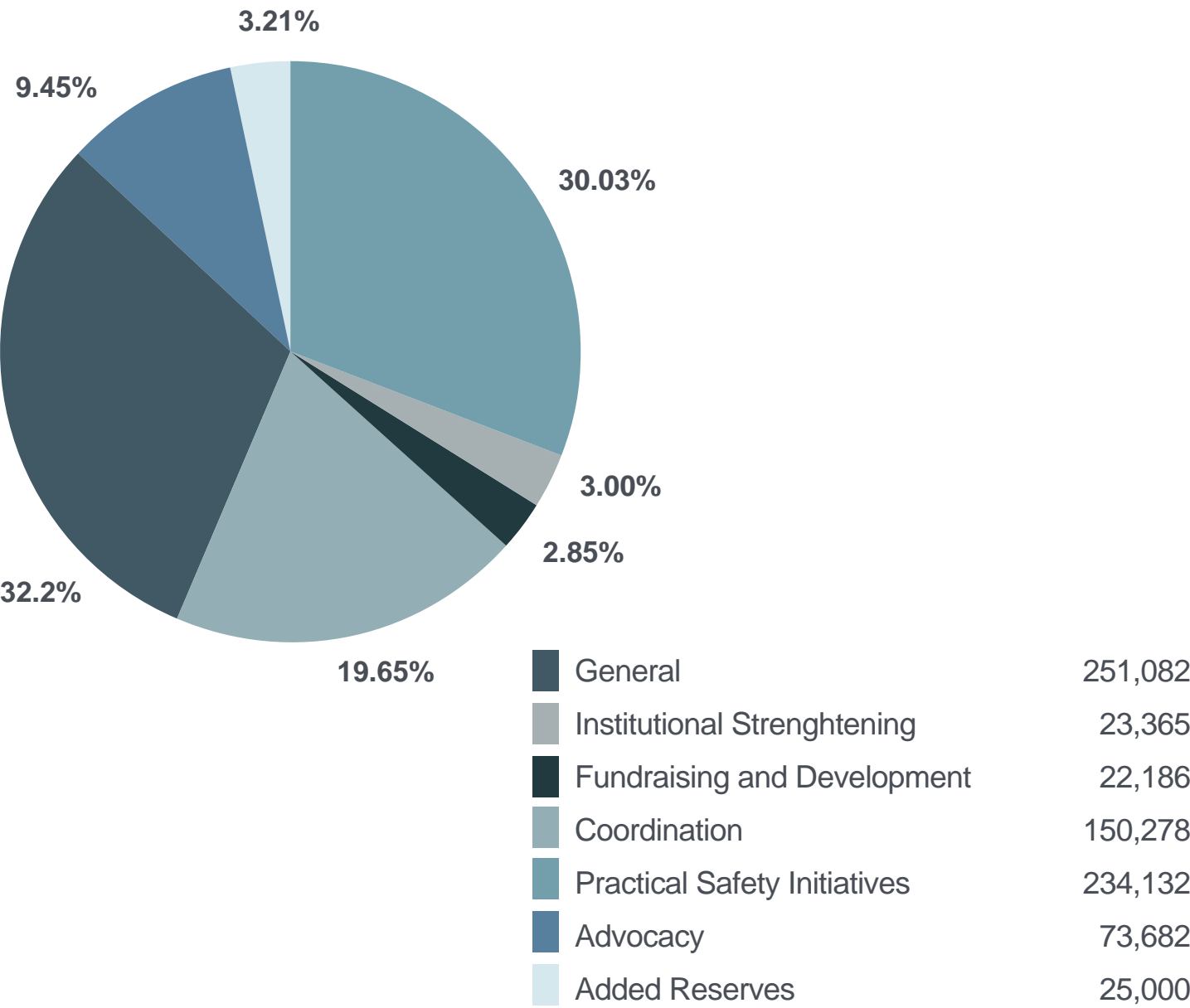
US\$ 930,134

Note: Received in 2024. \$779,725 allocated to 2024

Major Funders

Ford Foundation
Open Society Foundations
The Reva and David Logan Foundation
Limelight Foundation
Luminate Foundation
MacArthur Foundation

Expenditures



US\$ 779,725

Note: Includes \$218,030 pro bono support

ACOS BOARD AND TEAM

Board of Directors

Maria Salazar-Ferro

Director, Newsroom Safety and Resilience,
The New York Times (Chair)

Andréa Schmidt

Freelance Journalist and Independent Filmmaker (Secretary)

Elisa Lees Muñoz

Executive Director, International Women’s Media Foundation (Treasurer)

Salima Belhadj

Editor in Chief, AFPTV North America, Agence France Presse (Executive Board)

Marc Perkins

Head of Investigations, Europe and Asia, BBC World Service (Executive Board)

Vanessa Charlot

Visual Journalist and Assistant Professor, University of Mississippi

Victoria Lavenue

Head of Assistance, Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

Finbarr O’Reilly

Freelance Photographer and Writer

David Rohde

Investigations Editor, NBC News

Lucy Westcott

Chief Emergencies Officer, Committee to Protect Journalists

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Executive Director

Molly Clarke

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Catherine Muema

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